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`Floods are avoidable' (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Poor development planning and inefficient maintenance have been pinpointed by the Prime Minister and his deputy as the reasons for the floods which hit the city on Thursday, leaving two dead and causing thousands to be stranded.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on his return from a two-day visit to Dubai today that the Government would need to spend large sums of money and deal with other issues like the squatter problem to overcome the situation.

"Our design and development is not so good. It may be a bit late now to do anything, unless we are prepared to spend a lot of money and tackle the squatter problem," he said at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang.

His deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, at a separate function in Tanjung Karang, told the relevant departments to act fast and stop passing the buck.

"The attitude of accusing each other - this group or that, this department or that department - will not bring about anything. What is important is that all sit, discuss and take quick action," he said.

Both leaders were asked about measures to prevent the city from being hit by floods like the one on Thursday, said to be the worst since 1971.

However, Dr Mahathir also said he is convinced that efforts to overcome the floods with proper design and development plans would be objected to by Opposition parties.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had proposed that those found guilty of throwing rubbish in the rivers and drains be sent to jail.

Commenting on this, Dr Mahathir said people might misinterpret the Government's good intention.

"If we do that (impose the jail sentence), people will say we are not tolerant and do not care for the poor," he added.

Abdullah called on KL City Hall to convene a meeting. "What is important is for City Hall to call all agencies under it, including the Drainage and Irrigation Department of the Agriculture Ministry, to determine the reasons why the flooding occurred.

"It must be that the rivers must have been choked with garbage and the like. The water could not flow ... (due to) clogging. Or water may have come from surrounding areas, maybe due to construction works.

"But the water that rose in Kuala Lumpur came from water that flowed into the city from outside," Abdullah said.

Abdullah said the flooding woes also had to do with the problem of maintenance of roads and areas in the city.

"I have said before during my speech at the KL 21 Convention and Exposition (on Feb 12) that the problem is poor maintenance culture. We have beautiful buildings and wide roads but if garbage is not cleared, and building materials and the like used in construction ... that too can cause flooding as water cannot flow fast," he said, adding that City Hall should take any problem it could not handle to the relevant Ministry.

Asked about irresponsible developers taking the easy way out by connecting to existing drains without building their own, he said it might be so and that City Hall must act fast.

In Sibul, Bernama quotes Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Peter Chin as saying that his Ministry has proposed a social action plan

which developers will have to implement to check floods and other problems.

The plan calls for developers to provide for all social infrastructure facilities as well as amenities such as roads and proper drainage system.

Under the plan, developers building housing projects bordering rivers are to ensure that there is a certain amount of reserve land between the river bank and the project site, he said. Holding ponds, he added, would also be created near the river mouth to hold overflowing water and retard its movement into other areas.

The drain design concept would be improved so that rain water could seep into big storm drains and be discharged very quickly.

He said these programmes are already in the early stage of implementation in the country.

In Kuantan, Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association president Datuk Eddy Chen Lok Loi said that although developers do contribute to the flood, they are not the only ones responsible for the problem, however.

"It is very convenient to blame developers for the floods in the Klang Valley and we are not denying that some developers do not maintain their silt traps or retention ponds.

"However, the issue which needs to be looked into as a whole in the Klang Valley," he said.

Chen added that some people said that the recent floods in the Klang Valley were the worst to hit the area in 30 years.

"This means this problem existed some 30 years back. Back then, there was not much development and yet the Klang Valley was hit by this disaster. However, when the floods return after 30 years it is not fair if the developers are singled out as the main culprits," he said after chairing Rehda's national level meeting.